



Spring 2021 LORI Delivery Items Count Results

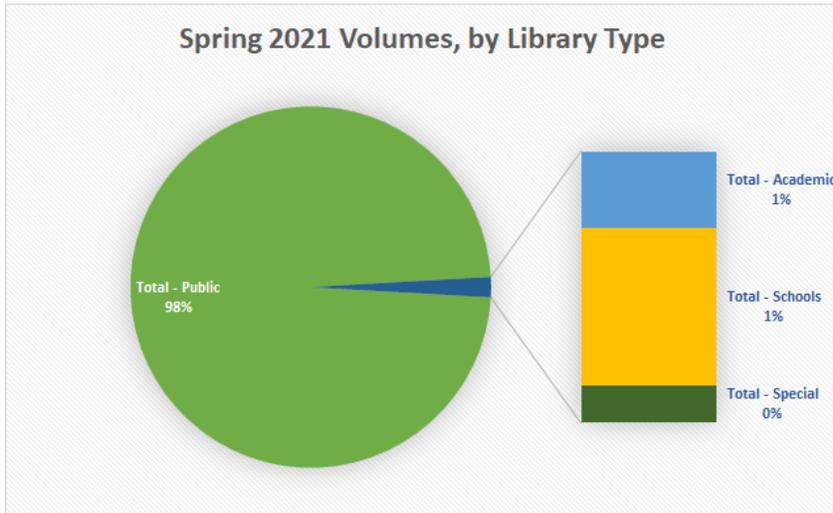
About the Survey

LORI libraries statewide participated in the biannual Delivery Items Count from March 21, 2021 through March 27, 2021. 135 library facilities that receive OLIS-LORI Delivery services recorded and reported their out-going item counts. Altogether, 31,086 items were transported in the LORI Delivery system during the week, representing about a 26% decline in volume from the 2019 data from the same survey. This is the first item count survey held during the COVID-19 pandemic. So many institutions closed during the first months of the pandemic that the Fall 2020 Item Count was cancelled.

On a personal level, the COVID-19 pandemic represents a time of great sacrifice and tragedy for many individuals in the Rhode Island Library community. On a professional level, the data collection for this survey happened amid periodic building closures and reductions in hours, staffing shortages, and logistical complications for delivery personnel. All of this contributed to below average volume. It is worth noting that this number still represents improving conditions in the state, since the LORI network was able to conduct the survey.

The survey, and particularly this report, represent a snapshot of the volume traveling across the entire multi-type, LORI delivery network. The network contains not only public libraries but also school, higher education, government, specialty, and independent libraries. The goal of this survey is to provide a general overview of the entire network, rather than an in-depth view of specific network members or types and to specifically examine the volume of material handled by the network's delivery system. For a more extensive breakdown of public library circulation not limited to items traveling the LORI network delivery system, see Ocean State Libraries (OSL) [statistics data pages](#).

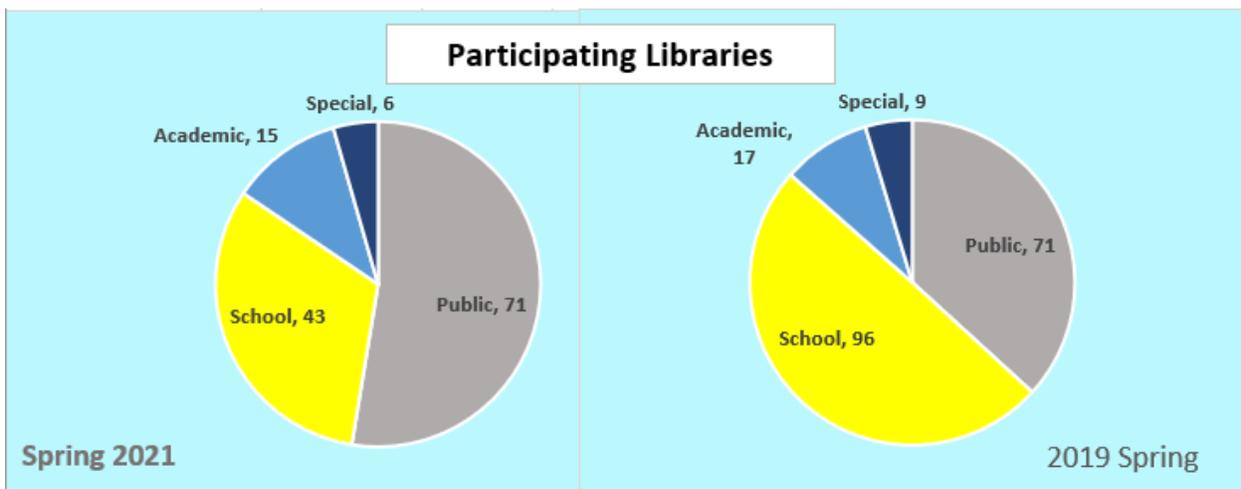
Survey Summaries



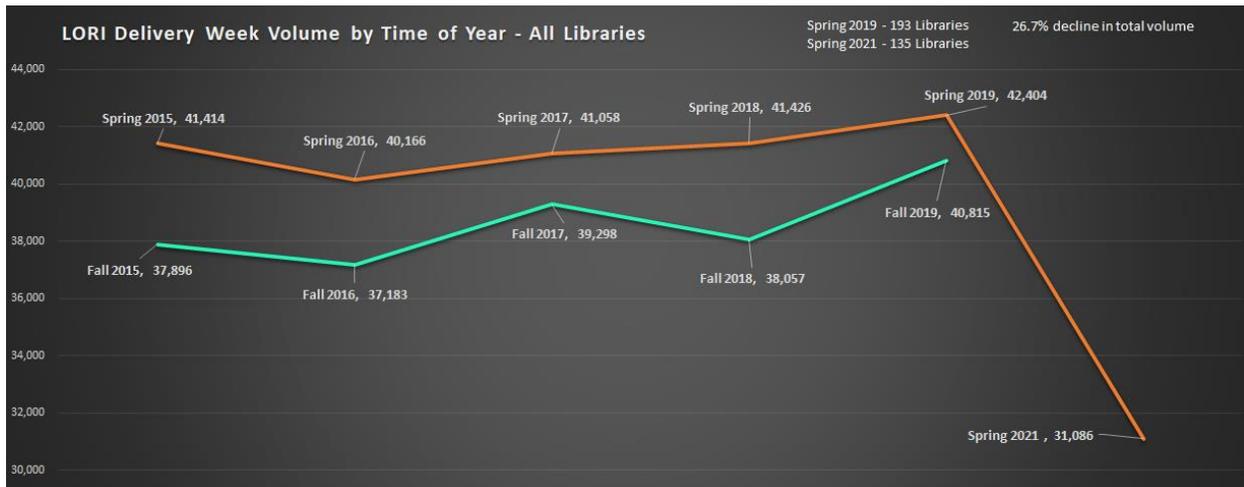
Of the 31,086 outgoing items, 30,524 (98%) came from public libraries while the remaining 2% came from academic, school, and special libraries. Schools and academic institutions closed earlier in the pandemic and have stayed closed for longer than other library types for safety reasons.

Overall, the heaviest delivery traffic occurs on Mondays. On Monday, March 22nd, 7,338 items were placed in delivery bins to be transported from LORI libraries.

School closures were a significant contributing factor to the decline in LORI membership certifications for this fiscal year and for the decline in responding libraries to this survey. Whereas 193 libraries responded to the survey in the Spring of 2019, only 135 libraries responded to this, the Spring 2021 survey, even though in March the pandemic was in its 12th month.

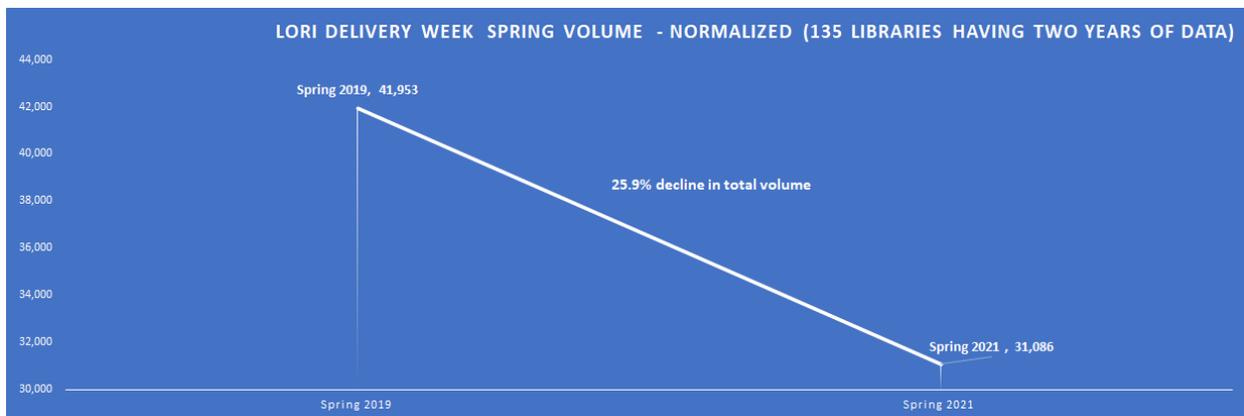


Volume Breakdown and Analysis

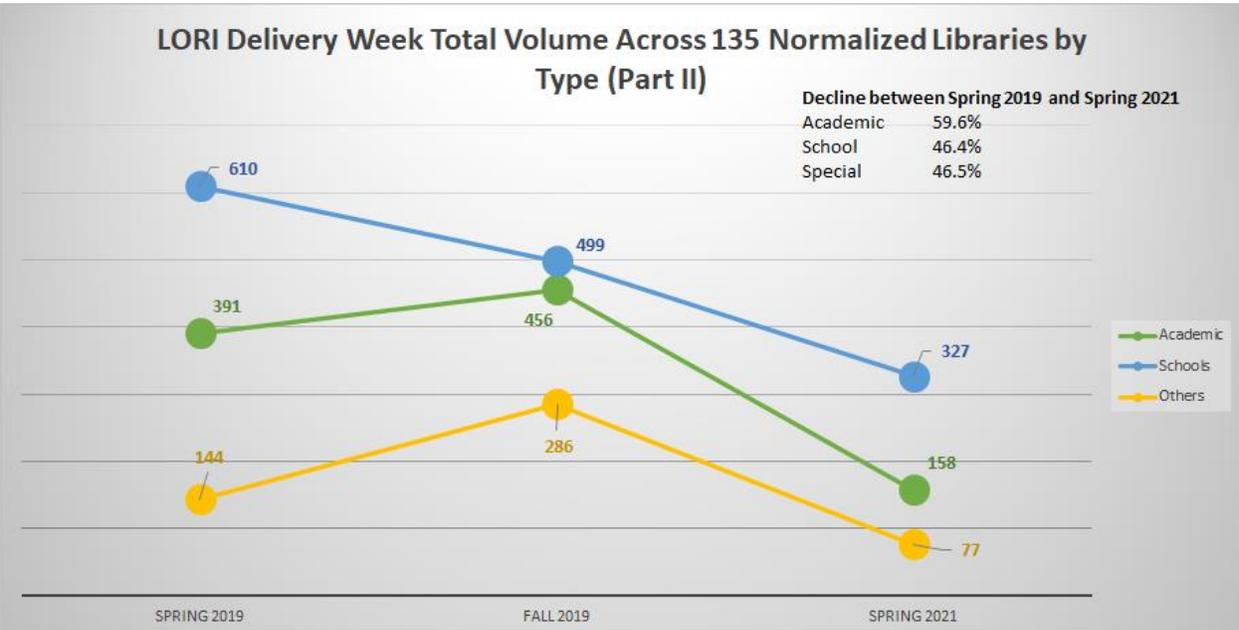
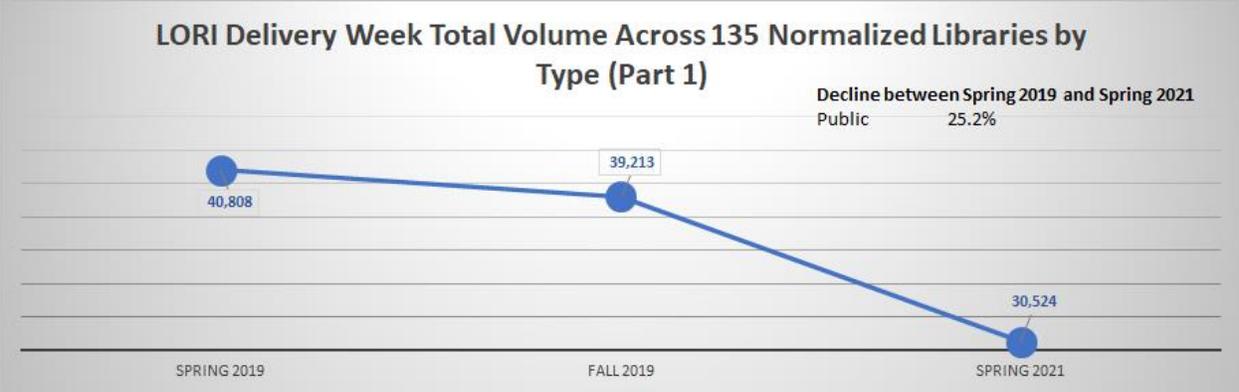


Against this backdrop, there was a 26.7% decline in volume from the Spring 2019 figure. Since the overwhelming majority of item traffic comes from public libraries in the LORI network, it is useful to further contextualize this percentage by including a normalization graph of the decline.

The drop in responding libraries does not, by itself, account for the drop in volume. Instead, we can demonstrate the drop in volume is noticeable even among consistently responding libraries who kept their doors open during the pandemic. Of the 135 libraries that participated in both the Spring 2019 and Spring 2021, there was a 25.9 percent decline in overall volume, despite library offerings such as curbside pickup and enhancing cleaning and quarantine procedures.



Furthermore, this decline is noticeable for these 135 libraries across all library types. This is especially true for libraries that closed entirely for extended periods of time, particularly among non-public libraries. The decline is about twice as great for schools and special libraries when compared to public libraries. For academic libraries, the decline is more than twice as great.



The conclusions we can draw are limited, especially because the degree to which a library is open to its patrons and the services it provides, and its COVID mitigation strategy all vary from location to location. However, given that the data we examine here occurred 12 months into the pandemic, it indicates lasting depreciative effects from COVID-19 on circulation. There are numerous potentials, outside contributing factors that may have helped perpetuate this volume reduction. Three of these are first: that a vaccine was not readily available at this time, second: that state-enforced social distancing restrictions were still in place, and third: that varying authoritative results existed regarding the virus's lifespan on different types of traditional bound materials. See the [Reopening Archives, Libraries and Museums \(REALM\) project](#), undertaken by the CDC and Institute of Museums and Libraries (IMLS)

This data, especially when compared against the absence of data in the immediately previous survey period, illustrates a slowly improving situation that nevertheless remains far below pre-COVID levels of activity and does not suggest when numbers may return to previous levels. It is expected that by the time of the next Item Count Survey (around October of 2021) the COVID-19 vaccine will be widely distributed among the population and the state government will have lifted many of the social gathering, and distancing restrictions that are presently still in effect. It is hoped that this next survey will reflect this progress.